

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 4558

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS, 12-31-79

TAGS: MCAP, NATO, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIAN FORCE PROPOSALS

REF: USNATO 4475

SUBMMARY: BELIAN PERMREP DE STAERCKE GAVE SPIRITED DEFENSE OF BELGIAN FORCE PROPOSALS AT PREMREPS LUNCH SPETEMBER 25. HE SAID BELGIUM WOULD MAINTAIN ITS NATO COMMITMENTS AND ALLIES COULD VERIFY THROUGH ANNUAL DPQ REVIEW PROCESS. THERE WAS NO NEED FOR MC OR SHAPE TO INVOLVE SELVES IN STUDY OF THE BELGIAN PROPOSALS. U.S. REP OBSERVED THAT THE NATO MILITARY HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH NATIONAL FORCE PROPOSALS THAT ARE PUT FORWARD BY ONE GOVERNMENT, APPROVED BY NATO, AND THEN ARE NOT IMPLEMENTED BY A SUCCEEDING GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. AT PERMREPS LUNCH SEPTEMBER 25, BELGIAN PERMREP DE STAERCKE CITED HIS RECENT LETTER TO THE SYG DESCRIBING THE BELGIAN MOD'S PLAN TO CONVER GRADULLA OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS FROM A CONSCRIPT TO A VOLUNTEER FORCE. HE REASSURED THE ALLIES THAT BELGIUM IS A SLAVE TO THE PROCESS OF CONSULTATION, BUT SAID IT WAS NECESSARY TO DISCLOSE CONFIDENTIAL

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THESE PLANS TO THE BELGIAN PUBLIC AT AN EARLY DATE FOR PURPOSES OF EDUCATION. DE STAERCKE CONTINUED THAT BELGIUM WILL UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES KEEP ITS FORCE COMMITMENTS TO NATO, AND THAT ALLIES MAY VERIFY EACH YEAR BY MEANS OF THE

DPQ PROCESS THE WAY IN WHICH BELGIUM IS MAINTAINING ITS COMMITMENT. HE LIKENED THIS CHANGE IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE BELGIAN ARMY TO THE EARLIER CONVERSION OF UK, CANADIAN AND U.S. FORCES FROM CONSCRIPT TO VOLUNTEER FORCES AND GAVE HIS PERSONAL ASSURANCE THAT BELGIUM COULD DELAY OR RETARD THE CONVERSION PROCESS IF AT ANY TIME THERE WERE INSUFFICIENT NUMBERS OF VOLUNTEERS TO FLESH OUT ITS MILITARY UNITS. HE FURTHER EXPLAINED THAT DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS FULLY APPRECIATES THE COSTS INVOLVED AND THAT IN CONSULTATION WITH THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND PARLIAMENT HE IS PREPARED TO PROVIDE THE ADDITIONAL SUMS THAT WILL BE NEEDED TO RECRUIT AND PAY VOLUNTEERS.

2. VILLADSEN (DENMARK) BEGAN TO POSE A QUESTION ABOUT BELGIAN PLANS; BUT DE STAERCKE ADMINISTERED SUCH A VERBAL DRUBBING ABOUT DENMARK'S 5,000 MAN SHORTFALL AND FORMER AMBASSADOR HJORTH-NIELSEN'S INABILITY IN PAST DPC SESSIONS TO ANSWER DE STAERCKE'S QUESTIONS THAT VILLADSEN NEVER COMPLETED THE QUESTION. DE STAERCKE WENT ON TO OBSERVE THAT THE U.S. AND THE UK HAD IN YEARS PAST RESTRUCTURED THEIR FORCES FROM CONSCRIPTS TO VOLUNTEERS WITHOUT PAINFUL AND LENGTHY INTERROGATION BY THEIR NATO ALLIES; AND HE THEREFORE INSISTED ON THE SAME RIGHT FOR A SMALL ALLY LIKE BELGIUM WHOSE MOTIVES WERE EVERY BIT AS GOOD.

3. DE STAERCKE SAID THAT THE BELGIAN PROPOSAL DID NOT INVOLVE A DEPARTURE FROM THE CURRENT DPQ AND THAT FUTURE COMMITMENTS COULD BE REVIEWED EACH YEAR IN THE REGULAR NATO PROCESS. HE SAID HE SAW NO REASON WHATEVER WHY GENERAL STEINHOFF AND THE MILITARY COMMITTEE SHOULD INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN A STUDY OF THIS QUESTION, NOR SHOULD SHAPE.

4. MCAULIFFE (U.S.) REMARKED THAT FROM DUTY IN A PREVIOUS POSITION HE KNEW THAT THE NATO MILITARY OF ALL NATIONALITIES AND ALL SERVICES HAD LEARNED FROM BITTER EXPERIENCE THAT GOVERNMENTS FREQUENTLY PUT FORWARD PROPOSALS TO NATO IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THAT AN INDIVIDUAL PURCHASES A LARGE ITEM OF HOUSE-CONFIDENTIAL

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HOLD EQUIPMENT: THE GOVERNMENT OUTLINES A PLAN WHICH PROMISES FUTURE BENEFITS, AND IT MAKES A SMALL DOWN PAYMENT AND PERHAPS PAYS ONE OR TWO INSTALLMENTS -- BUT THEN A SECOND GOVERNMENT COMES TO POWER AND FAILS TO IMPLEMENT THE PLAN ORIGINALLY PRESENTED. DE STAERCKE INSISTED THAT THIS COULD NOT HAPPEN IN THE BELGIAN CASE SINCE THE GOB HAD ALREADY EARMARKED 800 MILLION BELGIAN FRANCS FOR MEN AND EQUIPMENT AND HAD PROMISED TO SET ASIDE AS MUCH AS 5 BILLION BELGIAN FRANCS IN THE YEARS TO COME TO MEET THE STEADILY INCREASING COSTS OF A VOLUNTEER FORCE.
MCAULIFFE

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